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NEWS

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KING SALMON – Faced with a continuing decline in the Northern Alaska Peninsula caribou herd, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game will not be issuing any Tier II subsistence permits to hunt the herd this year.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which manages a subsistence hunt on federal lands in the area, also is moving to shut down hunting of the herd.

During the May application period, ADF&G had indicated it would issue up to 40 Tier II caribou permits for Game Management Unit 9, but Grant Hilderbrand, regional supervisor for the Division of Wildlife Conservation, said new information has come to light since the permit supplement was published.

This year's population surveys indicate the herd is less than 2,000 animals, well below the 1988 peak of 20,000. Nutritional problems and predation by wolves and bears have been the primary culprits in the decline, he said.

But fieldwork this spring also indicated a significant parasite problem.

"Of particular concern is *Ostertagia*, a parasite that reduces pregnancy rates and calf weights," Hilderbrand said.

"The bottom line is that this herd faces significant and numerous challenges," he said. "Further study will continue to assess the impact of these various factors, but additional adult mortality through human harvest is not biologically justifiable."

Hilderbrand said the issuance of any permits conveys a message that some level of harvest is acceptable and does not reflect the gravity of the current ecological situation.